



Chemist in the "Third Reich"

The impetus for the project initiated by Helmut Maier (University of Bochum) on behalf of the German Chemical Society (GDCh) *Chemists in the "Third World". Reich*" gave rise to controversies dating back to 2001. At the center of the disputes was the ambivalent role of Richard Kuhn, Nobel Prize winner in chemistry and former president of the GDCh (1964-1965), as a researcher and scientific organizer under National Socialism. Critical historical research on Kuhn, who had been president of the predecessor organization, the German Chemical Society (DChG), from 1938 to 1945, had previously brought to light explosive findings about his career as a nerve gas researcher and his conduct towards Jewish scientists under the Nazi regime. Due to the overwhelming burden of proof, the GDCh Executive Board decided in 2005 to no longer award the Richard Kuhn Medal, the highest endowed award of the society. It was "undisputed that he supported the Nazi regime administratively, organizationally and in particular through his scientific work", according to the Society's statement. According to the GDCh board, Kuhn "had made a name for himself as a role model, particularly through his unreflective poison gas research, but also through his behavior towards Jewish colleagues and thus as the namesake of an important award. disqualified by the GDCh".

The fierce controversies that followed led to the GDCh's decision in 2007 to commission a comprehensive historical investigation into the Nazi past of the DChG and the Association of German Chemists (VDCh). With its decision to commission the proven critical science and technology historian Helmut Maier with this investigation and to open its archives to him without reservation, the GDCh not only showed courage but also, as the present study proves, a lucky hand. Maier researched an immense number of new sources in 14 state and private company archives and analyzed over 40 trade journals. He succeeds in clearly structuring this wealth of material in his presentation. In terms of content, Maier deconstructs the whitewashing narratives of former Nazi functionaries and shows how these legends shaped historiography for a long time. He remembers the victims and names the perpetrators. The responsibility of chemists for anti-Semitic persecution, "Aryanization", chemical war mobilization and their aiding and abetting or even direct participation in war crimes, such as

He provides concrete evidence of the robbery and plundering in the occupied territories or the crimes against humanity of the Nazi policy of extermination using many case studies. Where the sources do not allow for a clear judgment, Maier argues in a balanced manner without ever becoming apologetic.

Maier's study is structured chronologically. Starting with the founding of the two GDCh predecessor organizations, which dates back to the 19th century, he examines the institutional-historical development of the DChG, which was more oriented towards university chemistry (around 4,000 members in 1933), and the VDCh, which was more focused on industrial chemistry (around 7,000 members in 1933), in terms of personnel, structure and economics, each in the political and wartime context of the Nazi regime. In a comparative perspective, the "Gleichschaltung", the gradual exclusion of "non-Aryan" members and the inclusion of the chemists' associations in the course of the professional reorganization of academic professional organizations under National Socialism are shown. This process, which was accompanied by political power struggles and a partial change of generation among science policy functionaries, ultimately led to the founding of the Chemistry Division of the Nazi Federation of German Technology. In this context, Maier analyses the attempts by national revolutionary groups among chemists, which began in 1933, to gain power and influence "from below" by building up competing, genuinely National Socialist chemists' organizations. This ultimately failed, but accelerated adaptation processes in the traditional organizations and the Nazification of the executive boards and workforces of the chemists' associations and their publishers.

Maier then turns to the concrete practice of the specialist group work of the chemical associations, which supported the Nazi regime's preparations for war by setting up gas and air protection organizations, as well as promoting the autarky policy strategy by means of synthetic substitutes in the context of the four-year plan for military rearmament. Using a variety of different sources, Maier for the first time precisely reconstructs the membership movement of the DChG and the VDCh, including the question of how anti-Semitic persecution, forced resignations, flight and expulsion affected them. A separate chapter is devoted to the wartime work of the Reich Chemistry Division in the NSBDT. It analyzes the war conferences and the association and professional political activities. A large proportion of the "followers" working for the DChG were classified as indispensable and were spared deployment on the front.



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Maier shows that in 1942, of the approximately 15,000 German chemists, only 1,875, or around 12.5 %, were called up to the Wehrmacht. This relatively low proportion compared to other occupational groups shows how much the regime relied on the expertise of chemists in wartime research and production.

In a further chapter on "community work" for the Nazi extermination apparatus, Maier describes the decision to relocate the VDCh's headquarters to Frankfurt am Main in connection with its centralization efforts, a decision that had a long-term effect beyond 1945. At the same time, he shows how the expansionist war aims of Nazi aggression aimed at world domination influenced international relations in terms of association policy. Under wartime conditions, chemical functionaries of the DChG and the VDCh not only strove for a Europe-wide organization of chemists under German domination, but also actively participated in the mobilization of resources for the Nazi war machine. They did not stop at criminal plundering in the territories occupied by the Wehrmacht. The head of the Gmelin editorial office, Erich Pietsch, played a key role in this. Together with the Eastern Economic Staff of the High Command of the Wehrmacht and the War Economic Office of the Reich Research Council, Pietsch systematically organized loot raids on a considerable scale in Ukraine, which belonged to the Soviet Union. The transportation of the loot (libraries, laboratory instruments, chemical plants, raw materials, etc.) required 38 railroad wagons. Pietsch was also responsible for organizing the scientific deployment of prisoners in the chemical detachments of the Plaszów concentration camp near Krakow and the Flossenbürg concentration camp. In painstaking research work, Maier has gathered the last traces of the lives of numerous Jewish chemists who were deported to German concentration and extermination camps. Only a few of them survived. One example is Edith Josephy, who was a member of the Beilstein editorial team and published regularly in the *Zeitschrift für angewandte Chemie*. After losing her job, she managed to flee to the Netherlands in 1937, where the regime's henchmen caught up with her after the occupation. She was arrested in 1942, deported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp in May 1943 and from there to the Auschwitz extermination camp at the end of October 1944, where she was murdered. She was one of

those victims who were ignored and forgotten by the GDCh and the *Zeitschrift für angewandte Chemie*. Maier's study can be seen as a plea for the successor institutions to actively work towards a worthy remembrance of the persecuted and murdered chemists in the future. Maier's study provides numerous pointers and food for thought in this regard. At the end of his study, he takes stock of the disruptive effects of the Nazi regime, differentiating between fallen, imprisoned and deported chemists as well as those who saw no way out due to persecution and committed suicide.

In summary, Maier's book provides an impressive overall panorama of the scientific, journalistic, publishing and also scientific and association-political activities of chemists in the "Third Reich", which goes far beyond the focus on the DChG and the VDCh. In addition to 40 illustrations and illustrative diagrams, the volume contains over 100 tables, including statistics on the membership movement, the CVs of important functionaries and office holders, their links with the NSDAP, authorities and repressive organs of the Nazi state, as well as on scientific specialist group work, conferences and foreign connections. Particularly noteworthy are the lists and tables containing information on persecuted and expelled chemists and those who were imprisoned in concentration camps. Maier's study, which is supplemented by a comprehensive register of persons, institutions and companies, will remain the standard reference work for a long time - until the DChG files, which despite intensive research have not yet been found, are rediscovered and made accessible to researchers. They had been stored by the DChG in a mine tunnel in Rüdersdorf in 1944. In April 1945, they were seized by the Red Army and taken to the Karpov Institute in Moscow together with the secret research documents of the nerve gas working group led by Richard Kuhn. There their trail is lost.

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